



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

ECCV 2008-2009
STATE BUDGET SUBMISSION
Maintaining a Multicultural Victoria

Statewide Resources Centre
150 Palmerston Street, Carlton VIC 3053
T 9349 4122 F 9349 4967



ECCV 2008-09 STATE BUDGET SUBMISSION – Maintaining a Multicultural Victoria

FOREWORD

Victoria is arguably Australia's most multicultural state, with around 20 per cent of Victorians speaking a language other than English at home and nearly half of Victorians either born overseas or having one or more parents born overseas. As such the Victorian Government in planning for the next State Budget needs to pay particular attention to the concerns of Victoria's multicultural communities.

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the statewide, peak advocacy body representing multicultural communities in Victoria. For over 30 years, ECCV has remained the principal liaison point between ethnic communities, government and the wider community in Victoria. ECCV has been a key player in building Victoria as a successful, harmonious and multicultural society.

As part of its advocacy and policy role, ECCV presents its 2008-09 State Budget Submission entitled *Maintaining a Multicultural Victoria* for consideration to the Victorian Government in the development of the 2008-09 State Budget. The ECCV 2008-09 State Budget Submission calls for significant funding initiatives in areas like employment, aged care, transport, housing, education, language services, and health.

New and Emerging Communities in Victoria, particularly those from the Horn of Africa and Sudan need ongoing support in the areas of language, housing, schooling and employment.

We hope that the Victorian Government will take note of ECCV's budget submission. ECCV will carefully analyse all State Government budget announcements to ensure they address the needs of Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations.

ECCV looks forward to continuing to work with the Victorian Government to strengthen and maintain multiculturalism in Victoria.

Yours sincerely,

Phong Nguyen
Chairperson
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria

Peter van Vliet
Executive Officer
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, as the peak body for Victoria's multicultural communities, recommends the following policies for consideration by the State Government of Victoria for its 2008-09 State Budget.

Key features of the ECCV *2008-09 State Budget Submission* are as follows:

- **Employment:** fund more targeted initiatives for Victoria's newly arrived communities; restore funding and support of the Workforce Participation Partnerships Program targeting disadvantaged people from CALD backgrounds.
- **Aged Care:** greater funding of ethno-specific agencies; greater client choice in home and community care; the reintroduction of the former Victorian Government pensioner motor vehicle registration concession discount and standardised utility concession rates for those on the pension throughout the year.
- **Housing:** greater funding and targeted accommodation for people from new and emerging communities living in Victoria's public housing estates.
- **Transport:** support our international students and end discrimination against them by providing them with access to public transport student concession cards; further support for our new and emerging communities in obtaining driver licenses; further measures directed at achieving a safe, inclusive and accessible transport system.
- **Language Services:** significantly increase interpreter funding in hospitals; invest more funds in interpreter scholarships for people from new and emerging communities.
- **Education:** more targeted educational initiatives for students from new and emerging communities; continued funding for After Hours Ethnic Schools, greater support for the English as a Second Language Program.
- **Health:** further support and funding to ethno-specific agencies in delivering appropriate mental health services to their communities; funding for a full-time drugs and alcohol multicultural liaison officer within an appropriate multicultural agency to provide research, advocacy, education and information services.
- **Regional Victoria:** greater support for culturally and linguistically diverse communities with flexible funding and investment in settlement services.



1. EMPLOYMENT

More targeted employment services

People from CALD backgrounds, especially new and emerging communities face significant barriers to gaining meaningful employment. A lack of local work experience is also a barrier to obtaining employment. Country of origin work experience is often under-valued and overseas job references are often unacceptable to Australian employers.¹ Overseas qualification recognition is also a significant barrier to employment. Most professional organisations in Victoria have their own guidelines for recognising overseas qualifications. Some are not recognised, and as a result, many newly arrived migrants are required to update their qualifications at Victorian institutions, a process which is costly in terms of both money and time.²

Employment agencies such as Centrelink and Job Network have proven to be difficult in assisting newly arrived migrants in attaining long term employment. The system and procedure have often caused confusion and difficulties amongst migrants.

Workforce Participation Partnerships Program

The Workforce Participation Partnerships (WPP) Program have proven to be a successful program for our CALD and newly arrived migrants to gain work experience and secure long term employment.

Since its launch in November 2005, the Victorian Government supported the program and has funded 98 projects to assist more than 2,040 jobseekers across Victoria to secure ongoing employment.

The program targets people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, to find employment in areas where there are labour shortages. This has been a hugely successful program, at low cost, in placing disadvantaged people into the workplace.

Despite low unemployment figures, barriers to workforce participation remain acute in many CALD communities. For some entrants 18 months after arrival the unemployment rate is as high as 43 per cent, compared with the state average of around 4 per cent.

Many agencies have delivered successful programs to assist people from CALD backgrounds to transition into the workplace. Funded agencies such as New Hope Foundation have assisted dozens of young African men into the meat industry in regional Victoria, particularly in Castlemaine. Others such as the Victorian Arabic Social Services have assisted over 160 young people from Arabic speaking backgrounds that are disengaged into further employment.

The WPP program has created positive outcomes both for employers and participants. It has been hugely successful in providing real benefits to the Victorian community and economy. Migrants, employers and the wider community have all benefited greatly from this innovative and low-cost program.

Recommendations:

1. The Victorian Government should restore funding for the Workforce Participation Partnerships Program returning to the previous budget allocation of \$12 million dollars per year.
2. Establish a Refugee Skills Bridging Program to assist refugees transition into their qualified professions by working with employers and offering migrants work placements and on the job training.
3. Conduct extensive skills awareness programs targeting employers and industries and encouraging them to employ staff from diverse backgrounds.

¹ Dimock, Liz and Nsubuga-Kyobe, Apollo. African Communities and Settlement Services in Victoria: *Towards Better Service Delivery Models*. Melbourne, Australian Multicultural Foundation, 2002, pp. 44.

² *ibid.*, pp. 44.



2. AGED CARE

Victoria is experiencing a rapidly growing CALD ageing population. By 2011, 38 per cent of seniors in Melbourne will be from CALD backgrounds as our post-war migrants enter their senior years. The need for a comprehensive Victorian multicultural aged care strategy has never been greater.

Better Multicultural Home and Community Care

Ethno-specific providers are the missing link in the debate about culturally appropriate home and community care services. The State Government has expended significant energy and resources through both the Culturally Equitable Gateways Strategy (CEGS) and cultural action planning to enhance the capacity of generalist service providers to deliver more appropriate care. While this is to be applauded, little effort has been made to address the other side of the equation which is in building the capacity and funding of ethno-specific agencies to provide responsive and professional services where their communities are large enough to warrant ethno-specific services. Clearly communities with large ethno-specific populations should be entitled to deliver services, particularly communities such as the Italian, Greek and Polish communities who have large numbers of seniors with low level-English proficiency. Interestingly, generalist providers are increasingly turning to ethno-specific agencies for advice on how to deliver culturally appropriate care because they do not have the expertise themselves.

State based concessions for Victorian Seniors

Pensioners born overseas comprise nearly forty per cent of aged pensioners and this figure is currently rising. Many did not have the opportunity to build superannuation nest eggs. Many CALD pensioners helped build Australia and contributed in supplying goods and services through the post-war years.

Many full pensioners are struggling to make ends meet due to rising costs which are above the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in areas like public transport, food, utilities and health care. These costs are rising at a higher rate than the old age pension, which is linked to an aggregate CPI and average male weekly earnings.

Health and pharmaceutical costs have increased by more than twice the inflation or CPI rate since 1990. As they age, seniors tend to need health and pharmaceutical services to a greater extent. The old age pension provision of \$262 a week, or \$219 a week each if you are a couple is simply not enough to live on with rising costs in the areas of transport, health care, household services and utilities.

The maximum concession of \$168 for pensioners to pay household rates is now far too low given that average property rates are over \$1,000 in Victoria.

Further when the Victorian Government withdrew the \$80 pensioner motor vehicle full concession in 2004, many pensioners feel they were not adequately compensated through other measures. Most of the savings from this measure went to younger families, students and health care card holders. Pensioners only received an increase in local government rates concessions which was not as great as the lost motor vehicle concession amount.

The maximum pensioner rates concession of \$168 is now far too low given that average property rates are now over \$1,000 in Victoria. Research by Gavin Dufty at St Vincent de Paul has shown that for pensioners renting in the private rental market and using public transport the cost of living has gone up at a much higher rate than the pension has increased. Dufty states that pensioners renting their homes and using public transport have seen increases in the cost of living at 30 per cent greater than the inflation rate. Effectively, the value of their pension has decreased for many in the last ten years.



Recommendations:

1. The Department of Human Services (DHS) should commit to strengthening the capacity of ethno-specific agencies. Greater funding for ethno-specific agencies and programs are needed where ethno-specific providers can demonstrate sufficient client numbers to justify ethno-specific service delivery. Where capacity exists ethno-specific agencies should be funded to provide HACC basic services.
2. Social support delivered by ethno-specific agencies should receive increased funding of 10 per cent to cater for the large unmet demand for these services by CALD communities.
3. Ethno-specific agencies and multicultural providers should be funded to provide information to families about carers support programs and to develop carer support groups in their communities.
4. The issue of concessions should be addressed and included in the Victorian Government's CALD Older Persons' Action Plan.

Below are recommendations from the Fair Go for Pensioners' Coalition Statement of Claims in which ECCV is a member organisation.

1. That the former Victorian State Government pensioner motor vehicle registration concession discount be reintroduced.
2. That utility concession rates be standardised throughout the year, in recognition that cooling systems in summer are as important to seniors' health and well-being as heating systems in winter.
3. That there should be an increase in the pensioner concession rates for utilities and council fees.
4. That public transport should be made free for pensioners.



3. HOUSING

The State Government announced in the 2007-08 Budget that it will invest \$510 million dollars into the redevelopment of public and social housing. The budget also included an increase in public housing rents for tenants who receive family tax benefit. Starting from April 2008, this is being increased from 11 per cent of the family tax benefit component to 15 per cent.

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) states that households with more children will be most severely affected with those with five children paying up to an extra \$20.79 a week. As 65 per cent of public tenant households currently fall below the minimum standard of living after paying rent, the proposed rent increase would most likely cause financial difficulties for a number of families who are receiving government support.³

Many African residents who reside in Victoria's public housing estates receive the family tax benefit. As a number of them have large families and mostly rely on government support, an approximate \$20 increase in rent would make it difficult to make ends meet. Due to the housing crisis in Australia and Victoria, many new arrivals are unable to afford rent. They are sometimes forced to move to regional areas with lower cost housing where sometimes there may be no available jobs.

Rates of home ownership and weekly income levels for Horn of African and Sudanese communities are much lower compared to other Victorian communities. For instance, home ownership rates among Ethiopian born persons are 10.3 per cent, as compared to 39.2 per cent for the average Victorian. A large number of Victorians born in Eritrea receive a very low level of income, less than \$160 per week, which is significantly less than the Victorian average weekly income.

A particular issue for our new and emerging communities is concern around the lack of available and suitable public housing for African families that have large numbers of children. It is important that every member of the family is given adequate facilities and conditions to ensure healthy and comfortable living standards.

Recommendations:

1. That the Office of Housing establish a reference group with representatives from new and emerging communities to discuss issues surrounding public housing. The group would also be able to contribute directly to policies and share information with the Office of Housing.
2. The Victorian Government should further develop policies to address concerns and support people from new and emerging communities living in public housing estates.
3. Invest funds to upgrade the conditions of public housing in Carlton, Flemington and North Melbourne for families that have large numbers of children.

³ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Housing Analysis*, State Budget 2007-08, pp. 4.



4. TRANSPORT

Access to transport is a significant issue for many low income and disadvantaged communities and people from CALD backgrounds. For some people with low level English proficiency, public transport may be difficult to access.

ECCV believes that effective transportation services for people from CALD and new and emerging communities' remains a challenge. To ensure that Victoria's transport system is inclusive, safe, accessible and equitable, ECCV proposes the Victorian Government should strongly consider the following recommendations.

Driving for new and emerging communities

People from new and emerging community backgrounds have difficulties in attaining their drivers' license when compared to most other Victorians. Many new and emerging community people, especially single mums and young people need to have access to private transport in order to get on with their daily lives.

There are many people from new and emerging communities that have difficulty gaining a license due to the cost of driving lessons, accessibility to a vehicle, misunderstanding of rules and regulations and language difficulties. This has led to some people driving without licenses. ECCV firmly believes that there is a need to address these issues so that our new and emerging communities can experience the same opportunities as the mainstream.

International Students and public transport concession cards

International Students are an important addition to Victoria's community. However, they are currently being denied concession rates to travel on Victoria's public transport. Victoria is also one of only two states in Australia that makes international students pay a full fare.

According to Australian International Education from the Department of Education and Training, international education was worth \$2.9 billion to the Victorian economy in the 2005-06 financial year. In contrast, it is estimated the cost of extending public transport concessions to international students would only cost around \$30 million – a fraction of international students' contribution to the Victorian economy.

For an international student studying at the University of Melbourne's Parkville campus, the estimated total cost of rent of a one bedroom shared bathroom and kitchen ranges from \$16,900 to \$22,600 per year. Other cost of living estimates other than rent includes \$45 per week on bills and \$50 per week on food and other utilities. For students that travel on public transport, they are required to pay \$102.40 per month for a zone one monthly ticket, compared to local students with concession entitlements, who are only required to pay \$51.20 per month.

International students are Australian residents for tax purposes and do pay income tax as well as GST. Victoria has over 100,000 international students and they have contributed greatly to Victoria's multicultural community by offering their skills, experiences and showcasing their original culture through active community involvement. As a matter of equity and fairness they should receive a student public transport concession like their Australian counterparts.

Recommendations:

1. Greater support for Victoria's international students by providing them with public transport student concessions.
2. VicRoads should further support members from new and emerging communities in attaining their drivers' license by establishing a volunteer training program to offer lessons with a minimal cost across the state.
3. Provide more translated documents on public transport particularly targeted to areas with high CALD populations.
4. Improving and expanding public transport in outer suburbs and regional areas where populations are growing.
5. Greater allocation of funding and planning for community transport options for the many Victorians who are unable to access public or private forums of transport.



5. LANGUAGE SERVICES

Providing decent language services for newly arrived migrants, particularly humanitarian entrants with low level English proficiency is critical in helping people build their new lives in Victoria. Older established communities also need decent language services as many older people from a non-English speaking background revert to their original language. Having efficient language services is a key component of providing equal access to government services.

Despite positive initiatives such as the Department of Human Services Language Services Policy (2005) and the Interpreter Symbol and Card, there remains a significant lack of funding for on the ground interpreters, particularly in health settings. Hospitals in areas with significant CALD populations in metropolitan Melbourne have insufficient funding for interpreter services and are drawing down on already stretched general hospital budgets to meet their language services obligations.

ECCV recommends that the Victorian Government recommit to funding scholarships for new and emerging languages, particularly from Africa and the Middle East. The availability of professional translator and interpreter programs offers new and emerging community members new employment opportunities and the relevant skills and experience to enter the workforce. With around 100,000 Victorians belonging to new and emerging communities where a number of them have significant cultural and language difficulties, having qualified interpreters provides much needed support for these communities in accessing government services.

Recommendations:

1. DHS should increase funding for interpreter services by around \$10 million per annum particularly in large hospitals in areas with large CALD populations.
2. The Victorian Government should continue funding interpreter training, with a further focus on training women and people in regional areas as interpreters to cater for the unmet needs of these groups.
3. The Victorian Government should develop strategies to increase the provision of language services in regional areas by offering scholarships to bilingual persons from new and emerging communities in those areas.
4. Further ongoing funding for universities to support interpreter qualifications especially in new and emerging community languages.



6. EDUCATION

Education challenges for Victoria's newly arrived communities

Victorian schools need continued strengthened support for professional development around CALD student issues, particularly students from refugee backgrounds.

The education system within Victoria was not developed to meet the needs of students with vastly different educational experiences to the mainstream. As a result, it is often difficult for students from refugee backgrounds to navigate the education system and retention within schools is an area of concern. The classroom environment can be intimidating, particularly when a lack of familiarity with the curriculum and methodology used is combined with low levels of English language proficiency. This may cause some young people to leave school early causing social problems down the track. There is a need for further support and investment in ensuring good outcomes in education and training for young people from refugee backgrounds. A major inquiry and public policy initiatives are required around this issue.

English as a Second Language Program

Children with a Language Other than English (LOTE) and refugee background should have the opportunity to access sufficient English as a Second Language (ESL) education programs from pre-school up to, and including Year 12. ESL provision for children should not be denied or limited due to demographic, social or economic status. There should be full access to ESL courses for newly arrived children and longer term students in more advanced ESL. ESL education for children should be culturally sensitive, provided within the school system wherever possible and affirm the dignity of the child and their home culture. ESL education should be taught by ESL qualified teachers, who have ongoing professional development and are recognised as ESL teachers within the school system.

The Victorian Government's policy for ESL provision in schools is commended. However, in practice, ESL teachers are often isolated and funds targeted for ESL provision is diverted by schools into other program areas and detailed accountability of such funds does not seem to occur. A strong monitoring role is required by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to ensure that such funding is spent on ESL programs.

Continued funding for After Hours Community Ethnic Schools

The Victorian government recently announced increased support for After Hours Community Ethnic Schools by topping up existing funding with a further \$300,000 in training for community languages school teachers, and increasing the per capita funding from \$100 to \$120 per student. While this is to be praised, many After Hours Community Ethnic Schools are still struggling and rely on the per capita funding as a source of income to cover for their expenses.

After Hours Ethnic Schools funding is constantly under pressure because State Schools are charging ever-escalating rates of rent for ethnic schools to use state school premises after hours. In light of the Victorian Government's community strengthening objectives, After Hours Community Ethnic Schools should be considered part of the wider community and offered discounted and uniform rental rates.

Recommendations:

1. The Victorian Government should develop further specialist programs for children from new and emerging communities and fund specialist educational programs such as early start home based learning assistance. The Government should ensure there are adequate teachers and teachers aides from new and emerging communities in schools with large new and emerging community populations. This area requires a major inquiry and significant public policy development.
2. Standardising discounted rental rates for After Hours Community Ethnic Schools using State Government school resources.
3. A strong funding commitment to the English as a Second Language (ESL) program to ensure that students from CALD and refugee backgrounds receive adequate support in English language development.
4. Increase the per capita funding from \$120 to \$130 to further support growing and establishing After Hours Community Ethnic Schools especially those from new and emerging communities.



7. HEALTH

People from CALD and new and emerging communities are still facing many barriers in accessing health services. Our health care services must provide information to ensure that all clients receive appropriate health care responses. ECCV calls for a strong commitment and funding of a CALD health promotion campaign for CALD communities. For new migrants, especially from the Horn of Africa and Sudan, there is a general lack of health prevention services, including understanding the causes of mental health and communicable diseases. Too few culturally appropriate support programs are in place and there is a need for more service providers to understand varying attitudes to mental health problems. Also, the lack of interpreters within the health sector and the difficulty of navigating our health system often cause problems for our CALD communities.

Improving access to mental health services for CALD communities

ECCV understands that the delivery of mental health services present significant challenges. People from CALD backgrounds have lower rates of access to mental health services due to language and/or cultural differences, stigma, the lack of knowledge of mental health illness and increased rates of social disadvantage. CALD consumers face challenges giving informed consent in their care and treatment or sharing information with service providers.

ECCV recommends that ethno-specific agencies should be directly funded to provide counselling services to their respective communities. CALD consumers often feel more comfortable when speaking in their own languages. Service partnerships between ethno-specific multicultural and mainstream providers supported by DHS should also be highly encouraged.

Drugs and Alcohol

ECCV supports and advocates for a harm minimisation approach to issues relating to alcohol and other drug use and abuse. A need exists for better research that identifies particular CALD communities that have higher levels of alcohol and drug abuse (including tobacco use) and related health and social problems, including prevalence of blood borne virus rates acquired through IV drug use.

ECCV proposes that a drug and alcohol multicultural liaison officer be funded to research alcohol and other drug abuse within CALD communities; provide information and education services to CALD communities about alcohol and drug prevention strategies; improve cultural awareness among mainstream service providers in this area; collaborate with other mainstream agencies around projects; and support ethnic community initiatives and partnerships which aim to minimise harm from alcohol and other drug use within CALD communities.

Recommendations:

1. There should be adequate funding to provide guaranteed access to interpreters and translators for patients at critical points during their health care.
2. To improve prevention and early intervention through funding a CALD health promotion strategy regarding conditions such as mental health, drugs and alcohol and of the services available to people from CALD backgrounds.
3. The Victorian Government should guarantee that all major health promotion initiatives should ensure a minimum of 10 per cent of their activities are targeted towards relevant CALD communities.
4. To fund and support ethno-specific agencies in delivering appropriate mental health services to their communities.
5. To ensure that professionals in the health sector receive adequate ongoing training in cultural competency.
6. Ensure that bilingual workers are appropriately funded to work in mainstream and ethno-specific agencies.
7. Continue to empower and encourage General Practitioners to engage with interpreters when treating patients with low levels of English.
8. Providing ongoing funding to an ethno-specific organisation for a full-time drug and alcohol multicultural liaison officer to deliver appropriate services to CALD communities.
9. DHS should strengthen its capacity to ensure mainstream agencies are meeting the needs of CALD communities in the alcohol and other drug harm minimisation area.



8. REGIONAL VICTORIA

In order to meet the skills shortages felt acutely across regional Victoria, the Victorian Governments' Skilled Migration Program has significantly increased the numbers of migrants settling permanently in regional communities in recent years. In addition, larger numbers of refugees and humanitarian entrants are settling in regional Victoria either through direct settlement or secondary migration.

The recently announced 'Global Skills for Provincial Victoria' strategy is an extension of the Victorian Government's previous 'Skilled Migration Program', and the new phase places particular emphasis on employment outcomes for new arrivals and communities. ECCV recommends that the Victorian Government compliment the emphasis on employment with the allocation of funds for programs which assist skilled migrants in regional Victoria with settlement. Effective settlement for new arrivals ensures that the diverse skills and resources which they bring to regional Victoria are retained.

Significant migration in regional Victoria, the process in which new arrivals leave their first place of settlement, has resource implications for multicultural organisations providing settlement services. Scope exists for the Victorian Government to invest and meet the resource gaps which secondary migration and inflexible funding arrangements create in regional Victoria for service providers.

Recommendations:

1. That the Victorian Government provide further funding and assistance to regional ethnic communities' councils (ECCs) and multicultural groups to assist with settlement in regional communities. Increased, secure core grant funding for regional ECCs is important for meeting the needs of new arrivals and established migrant communities in regional areas.
2. Further strategies targeted at improving access to interpreting and translating services in regional communities are required. Specific strategies may include greater funding of interpreting services, ensuring that government department language service policies are followed, offering scholarships to bilingual persons from new and emerging communities and ensuring sufficient numbers of female interpreters are available.
3. That projects fostering social support for new arrivals in regional Victoria are prioritised by Government to ensure that the skills migrants bring to such communities remain.
4. That community education strategies focusing on migration and cultural diversity are implemented across regional Victoria with funding for appropriate cross cultural awareness training to key service providers.
5. That greater funding be given to promoting multicultural arts and events in regional Victoria, particularly in the regions of Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Gippsland, Horsham, Mildura, Shepparton, Swan Hill, Wangaratta, Warrnambool, Wodonga and the surrounding areas.